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AUTHOR Nidiffer, Leone R.
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ABSTRACT

The Office of Institutional Research's role in planning and operating an off-campus center for California State University (CSU), Hayward, is described. Although the center would promote enrollment of nontraditional students, the planning and operating decisions are applicable to other higher education activities. Needs assessment for the center was based on data on demographics and student migration within the CSU system, as well as student characteristics and enrollment patterns for Hayward campus. A mail survey of county residents identified perceived needs for an off-campus center and measured interest in degree programs and preferred types of scheduling and instructional formats. The survey allowed for the responses of two people to take into account different educational needs and opinions of individual household members. Respondents could indicate the major they would select for degree programs. Of 2,387 surveys returned, over 1,600 contained hand written comments, and 51 percent indicated they would definitely attend the center. Information is provided on: characteristics of interested respondents and students who actually enrolled, the task of projecting enrollments and selecting degree programs, enrollments at the center in the third year of operation, and majors offered. (SW)

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Planning, Establishing and Operating A Successful Off-Campus Center: The Role of Institutional Research

Leone R. Nidiffer
Director, Institutional Studies
California State University, Hayward
Hayward, CA 94542
(415) 881-3655

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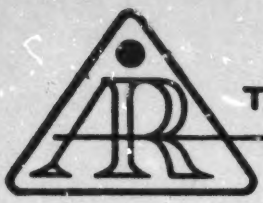

THE ASSOCIATION FOR INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

This paper was presented at the Twenty-Fifth Annual Forum of the Association for Institutional Research held at the Portland Hilton in Portland, Oregon, April 28-May 1, 1985. This paper was reviewed by the AIR Forum Publications Committee and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC Collection of Forum papers.

Elizabeth F. Fox, Chair
Forum Publications Editorial
Advisory Committee

Abstract

This paper presents the role of the Office of Institutional Research in the planning for and operation of an off-campus center which has met enrollment targets and become, in four years, the largest such center in the California State University System. The process is tracked from the initial gathering of descriptive secondary data, through the conduct of a needs-assessment survey which reached 30,000 households, to the follow-up studies which point the way toward future changes. Throughout the effort, the interaction between institutional research and university decision-makers has been productive and positive.

Introduction and Perspectives

California State University, Hayward is one of 19 campuses of the California State University (CSU) System. It is a nonresidential campus with an enrollment of 10,600 in 1980. Located in Alameda County, in the San Francisco Bay Area, the campus primarily serves Alameda and Contra Costa Counties which had a combined 1980 population of approximately 1.7 million.

In Summer 1980, the projected substantial decline in the number of high school graduates in the coming decade led university administrators to an investigation into the possible opening of an off-campus center in Contra Costa County. The immediate availability of two recently closed high schools in that county both emphasized the impending decline in high school graduates and triggered the move toward an off-campus center to serve those Contra Costa County students whose work and family obligations prevented them from relocating or commuting to on-campus courses.

One year later the center was in operation. Now, in its fourth year, it has grown to be the largest satelite center in the CSU System with an enrollment of nearly 850 students. The Office of Institutional Research has been extensively involved in the project. Institutional research provided enrollment forecasts and input for decisions regarding site selection, appropriate academic programs to be offered, course scheduling time and day modules, and instructional formats. As the operation of the center has expanded, the center Coordinator and his staff have

continued to work with the institutional research office, outlining information requirements and using the resulting analyses in their planning and operating decisions.

Purpose

The paper is designed to outline the steps and procedures which applied the abilities and resources of the Office of Institutional Research to the establishment and operation of a successful off-campus center. While the specific topic is an off-campus center to facilitate the enrollment of nontraditional students, the techniques and productive interaction of institutional research and university decision-makers are applicable to many situations in higher education.

Literature Review

Forecasted declines in the size of the traditional college-going population, as evidenced by high school graduate projections (The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education et al,1979), awakened the interest in better serving the needs of older, working, nontraditional students. Descriptions of such students (Cross, 1979) helped to shape the needs assessment survey, and later publications (Cross, 1981; Solomon and Gordon, 1981) in combination with local data have continued to guide the overall operating policies of the center.

Data Sources

In making their initial evaluation of the potential educational needs of Contra Costa County, the institutional researchers consulted United States Census data, available data and projections of the Demographic Research Unit of the California Department of Finance, and the county's future planning department. Publications of other governmental units also supplied data on available education resources, and the California State University System's statistical reports provided information on the patterns of migration of students to campuses within the CSU System. Internal reports on student characteristics and enrollment patterns were useful. The most important source of data, however, was a mail survey of county residents designed to identify the perceived needs for an off-campus university center and to measure the extent of interest in degree programs and the types of scheduling and instructional formats which the respondents preferred.

Methodology and Approach

Secondary Data Analysis

As university administrators were recognizing the projected decline in high school graduates and acknowledging the necessity for increased emphasis on the older, nontraditional students in order to maintain enrollment growth, a Contra Costa County community leader approached them with information regarding the

availability of potential sites for an off-campus center to be located in the county. Shortly after the initial discussions took place, the Office of Institutional Research was asked to provide the university President with available descriptive data regarding the attendance patterns and characteristics of residents of the county.

That examination revealed that residents of Alameda County, which was less than twice the size of Contra Costa County, outnumbered Contra Costa County residents at California State University, Hayward by a ratio of over four-to-one. Only 1,697 (16%) of the university's students were Contra Costa County residents. An additional 5,411 Contra Costa County residents, however, were enrolled at other campuses in the CSU System. Forty-nine percent of the students from Contra Costa County who attended CSU campuses left the San Francsico Bay Area to do so, more than twice the relocation rate of CSU students who were residents of any of the other large Bay Area county

The institutional research staff concluded that the available educational opportunities within the CSU System were adequately serving the younger student who could (or might prefer to) leave home in order to attend school. An analysis of the traffic and transportation patterns and commute times from Contra Costa cities to the Hayward campus added evidence that any unmet educational needs within the county were most likely being experienced by older adults whose work, home, and financial responsiblities made relocation impractical and for whom the long commute to evening classes at the Hayward campus through rush

hour traffic might be prohibitive in time and energy.

Based upon the presentation of the information analyses, the President formed a working committee to assess the need for an off-campus center in the area and develop the proposal and initial operation plans if justified. This committee included the President, the Executive Assistant to the President, the Vice President for Academic Affairs, the Chair of the Academic Senate, the Director of Continuing Education, the Director of Institutional Research, and an Administrative Fellow serving with the Vice President for Academic Affairs. The Director of Institutional Research was charged with the responsibility for gathering the necessary information, presenting analyses, and supporting all decision-making efforts in the process. While a spirit of enthusiasm was apparent among those working on the project, it was acknowledged that a proposal for an off-campus center would only be developed if unmet needs were identified which were sufficient to justify the center and were of a nature that could be met by a satelite center.

The Needs Survey

Because the high school locations being considered for the off-campus Center were also being considered for a number of alternate uses, and because the establishment of an off-campus center required the approval of the CSU System Board of Trustees and several state agencies, the university required immediate and timely information identifying the extend of unmet postsecondary educational needs in the county. To measure these needs, the mail

survey was developed .

The committee accomplished the design of the mail survey form in a remarkably smooth fashion. Working with a draft supplied by institutional research, the committee carefully evaluated each question for content and format. At each step, the institutional research director was regarded as a resource with expertise in survey design. However, every committee member remained deeply involved in the generation of the survey form. The needs survey was considered a committee effort, not an institutional research effort, and this strengthened the committee's commitment to using the results in planning.

The committee evaluated each proposed question to determine that it would generate information that was necessary for planning. Within a two page questionnaire (with a third page which concerned needs for programs offered through the independent School of Continuing Education) they created a survey to assess the extent of unmet postecondary education needs, identify the programs which should be offered to meet those needs, and create a profile of the potential students which could be used in the planning and initial operation of an off-campus center if one were established.

With no time for an effective pretest, the committee members assessed the format by intensive review of the wording of each question. In addition, they provided sample forms to staff representatives of the California Postsecondary Education Commission (which reviews all off-campus center proposals made by public institutions) and to an independent consultant for review.

The survey, as designed, had several features which made it particularly useful. First, each form allowed for the responses of two individuals. This recognized the potentially different educational needs and opinions of individual household members. Second, in order to measure unconstrained demand for degree programs, those who would consider attending the off-campus center were asked to indicate the major they would select, but were not provided with a listing of majors currently being offered at the university. A third feature of the questionnaire was an open response question which asked for any comments or suggestions regarding the proposal to open an off-campus center in the area. Of 2387 forms which were eventually returned, over 1600 contained hand written comments. Amazingly, only 36 were negative.

The critical question on the survey form asked, "If Cal State Hayward opened a center in Contra Costra County which offered the courses you needed, would you attend?" The question was worded in that manner so that respondents, and those who would analyse and use the resulting information, would be constantly aware that enrollments at the center would depend on offering needed courses and that all needs were unlikely to be met. Further, the survey respondents were forced to choose between only three response options: (a) "Yes, definitely," (b) "Possibly," and (c) "No." It was anticipated that only those with a very strong interest in an off-campus center would choose the strongest statement, with the majority of respondents indicating only a possible interest.

Needs Survey Responses and Their Use

The committee mailed the survey in early September 1980 to 30,000 households, a one-in-seven sample of the total county households. The 2,387 returned questionnaires represented the responses of 3,590 individuals. This 8% response rate exceeded the rate which the Director of Institutional Research had anticipated, based on the focus of the questionnaire upon upper division and graduate level education, and is not far from the 9.4% response rate for a similar off-campus study subsequently conducted by California State University, Fullerton in 1982. The responses received in the month of September, representing 3,256 area residents, were included in the detailed analyses. Manual tabulations of the responses to the question regarding intention to attend the center were made for those questionnaires returned after September 30.

The Office of Institutional Research analysed the responses using a standard statistical package. They prepared frequencies and cross tabulations and compared the responses to demographic questions to available county data. It was immediately apparent that there was substantial interest in the establishment of an off-campus center in Contra Costa County. Unexpectedly, fully 51% of the survey respondents stated that they would definitely attend such a center if it offered the courses they needed. Based on the expressed interest level and the survey response rate, the Director of Institutional Research estimated (at the 95% confidence level) that between 11,835 and 12,651 county residents would have checked the "yes, definitely" response if

the questionnaire had been mailed to all county households.

The demographic characteristics of the interested respondents were significantly different than those of the county residents who were currently attending the Hayward campus. Those with interest in the center were older, predominantly upper division and graduate level, residing within twenty minutes of the proposed center sites. When asked to indicate the principal reason for choosing the last college they had attended, the interested respondents most often selected "convenient location." The second most-often selected response was "college offered the special program needed."

The Office of Institutional Research prepared the response tabulations and analyses for presentation to the working committee. The most difficult task was the creation of enrollment projections. While the indication of interest was strong, the decision to reenter college is not one which is easily taken. For the older student, several years must be committed to part-time study, involving considerable change in lifestyle with consequences to established relationships in the family, the work environment, and the community. Further, the indications of intention to enroll were based on the offering of the courses the individuals needed. Many prospective students were seeking programs which could not be offered at an off-campus center, at least in the initial years. Others were unfamiliar with matriculation requirements and would be better served by community college courses or by extended education offerings. Additional interested respondents might lack the required

motivation or be unable, due to family, work, or financial responsibilities, to make the commitment to higher education at the time.

When no appropriate intention-action ratio was discovered in the consulted literature, the Director of Institutional Research used the only resources available, judgement and instinct, and selected a .05 ratio. Based on the estimate of the number of county residents who would have indicated intention to enroll, the institutional research office projected a first-year enrollment of 610 individuals. With an average unit load of 4.0, the office projected a budget level of 163 full-time-equivalent students (F.T.E.S.).

When the working committee met in October to evaluate the survey responses and begin the planning process, the Director of Institutional Research presented the tabulated data and her enrollment projections. She explained the reasoning behind her selection of the conservative .05 intention-action ratio and invited the committee to discuss the ratio and offer alternates based upon their administrative experiences. The committee accepted the enrollment projections, realizing that they were at a level which could be supported with the resources likely to be available, and directed itself toward the task of planning for the first-year operation of the off-campus center.

While the working committee evaluated existing university degree programs to determine which could be offered at an off-campus location and which would best suit the indicated interests of the survey respondents, the Director of Institutional Research

and the Administrative Fellow drafted the proposal which would be used to obtain approval and funding for the project and would also serve as the principal planning document for the center's operation.

In recognition of the need for clearly presented, concise material, the writers restricted the narrative of the proposal to 16 double-spaced pages. In those pages they included: an outline of the currently available educational opportunities, an explanation of the needs survey and its results, the enrollment projections and proposed academic programs, a statement of the proposed location and scheduling patterns, an explanation of the process which had led to the proposal, including campus and community involvement, and an analysis of the alternatives for serving the unmet needs if the center were not established. They added an appendix of 11 pages containing 22 tables prepared from the needs analysis. Although there were additional appendices included in the bound report (containing demographic data, letters and petitions indicating community support, a review by an off-campus consultant, and related supporting materials) the writers deliberately kept the primary report short in order to sharply focus the attention on three elements: (a) there were unmet educational needs in Contra Costa County; (b) the campus was capable of meeting those needs by establishing an off-campus center in the county; and (c) the establishment of an off-campus center was a cost-effective means for meeting the identified needs.

While the report was being written and reviewed, the working

committee identified the degree programs to be initially offered. Not surprisingly in today's educational environment, the respondents expressed strong interest in business administration (selected by 623 of the 1659 respondents who stated they definitely would attend). Therefore, the bachelor of science program in business administration was the first program to be included in the plan. Interest in teacher education was also strong (selected by 152 of the 1659), and the committee proposed that the center offer graduate courses in education. It selected the bachelor of arts in liberal studies, which offers a number of concentrations in various subject areas, as the second undergraduate degree program to be offered. The administrators believed that this program would interest those who planned to enter education but did not possess a bachelor's degree and would also allow reentry students to complete a degree with an emphasis in their preferred major. A student who had completed two or three years as a history major, for example, could build upon that base to earn a degree in liberal studies, history option. The committee recognized that there would be insufficient initial resources to adequately support more than two or three majors, each of which could be entirely completed at the center once a student had completed lower division work at an area community college or elsewhere.

At each stage of the planning the committee consulted with affected administrators, including school deans and department chairs. Because the needs survey had been regarded as a university project, not merely a study conducted by institutional

research, and because the Director of Institutional Research was a working member of the committee as well as a resource to it, the planning was always conducted with the identified needs clearly in mind.

In November the committee completed its review of the proposal draft and the document was printed. The President presented the proposal to the CSU Board of Trustees. With their approval, the proposal was forwarded to the California Postsecondary Education Commission and eventually was funded by the State Legislature. The Director of Institutional Research continued to be a resource to the project, explaining the survey instrument or the analyses as required. She served on the site selection committee, providing commute pattern and transportation analyses for the two alternatives. Again, the survey results were instrumental in the site selection, since the committee was constantly aware that it was choosing a location for evening classes to be attended by nontraditional students, most employed full time.

Results

Because the need for the center appeared so strong, the university had determined that it would attempt to offer some level of classes within Contra Costa County even if the full-service center were not funded. The newly appointed center Coordinator had worked with the university administrators to develop a schedule of classes and had maintained communication

with the community. Although there was little time to implement the full schedule between the notice of funding in Summer 1981 and the start of that fall term, the off-campus center opened its doors only a little more than one year after the concept was first proposed. By the spring term the enrollments, measured in F.T.E., were on target. They have increased steadily in each of the three subsequent years. Much of this growth can be attributed to the manner in which the center Coordinator and other university administrators keep in mind the purpose of the off-campus project. Annually, and additionally as changes such as the scheduling of day classes are proposed, the Office of Institutional Research is asked to provide analyses of the current enrollment and to compare that enrollment to the original plan and to newly developed data.

Table 1 contains a presentation of one comparison which was prepared for the analysis of the third year of operation. As can be seen, the F.T.E. achieved in the third year was slightly below the projection for the year as developed in 1980: 261 compared to 285. (However, Fall 1984 F.T.E. was 365, slightly exceeding the projection of 358 made 4 years previously.) In general, the students which the center has attracted have been the ones for which the center was planned. Although thirty-six percent of the center students also take at least one course at the Hayward campus, the profile of the center students is significantly different from that of the residents of Contra Costa County who attend the Hayward campus. This provides additional indication that the center has attracted new clientele, not merely deflected

Table 1

The Contra Costa Center in Fall 1983: Who Was Expected And Who Came

Factor	Who Was Expected	Who Came
Sex	40% male	39% male
Age	34 median age	30 median age
Level	44% graduates	43% graduates
Residence	36% Concord-Pleasant Hill	29% Concord-Pleasant Hill
	18% Walnut Creek	15% Walnut Creek
	(All other areas less than 8% each)	(All other areas less than 8% each)
Major	38% business admin.	42% business admin.
Students	855	669
F.T.E.	285	261
Units/Std.	5.0	5.8

Majors Planned by Fall 1983	Majors Offered Fall 1983
Business Admin. B.S., M.B.A.	Business Admin. B.S., M.B.A.
Liberal Studies B.A.	Liberal Studies B.A.
Education M.S.	Selected courses in Education
Counseling M.S.	Counseling M.S.
	Public Admin. M.P.A.
	Criminal Justice Admin. B.S.

students from the main campus.

The success of the center in attracting new students to the university and in providing a valued community service has been a source of pride to the university faculty, administrators and staff and to the area residents and community leaders. As a result, university administrators are now investigating other locations in which an off-campus center might be established, using the same method which resulted in the development of the Contra Costa County Center.

Implications for the Practice and Theory of Institutional Research and Analysis

The development of off-campus centers is only one of the many ways in which institutions can be expected to adapt to change. In all such cases, however, the role of institutional research in interacting with institutional decision-makers to assure that needed information is collected and presented in the most useful manner is vital. The development of the Contra Costa Center of California State University, Hayward demonstrated the success that can be achieved when the Director of Institutional Research is appointed as a working member of the decision-making body while still retaining the primary responsibility for the collection and analysis of data.

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